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NEWS RELEASE

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Gavel Passing to Mark Changing of the Guard for Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals

SAN FRANCISCO – Judges of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit will convene in a special session this week to mark the elevation of new Chief Judge Sidney R. Thomas of Billings, Montana.

Judge Thomas, who officially assumed his new duties today (December 1, 2014), succeeds former Chief Judge Alex Kozinski of Pasadena, California, who had held the office since 2007.

A ceremonial passing of the gavel to mark the change in court leadership will be held Friday, December 5, 2014, at the James R. Browning U.S. Courthouse in San Francisco. For reasons of space and security, attendance at the event is by invitation. However, the ceremony will be video streamed live for viewing via the Internet, beginning about 4 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. For more information on event streaming, see the court website: www.ca9.uscourts.gov.

By law, selection of the chief judge of a federal circuit or district court is based on seniority and age. The most senior active judge under the age of 65 is eligible to serve as chief judge for a term of up to seven years.

As chief judge, Judge Thomas, 61, assumes a variety of administrative responsibilities. In addition to hearing cases, he will chair two judicial policy-making bodies, the Executive Committee of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the Judicial Council of the Ninth Circuit, and represent the Ninth Circuit at biannual meetings of the Judicial Conference of the United States, the judiciary's national governing body. The chief judge also presides when an 11-judge en banc court is convened to resolve cases posing intra-circuit legal conflicts or to consider other matters deemed to be of exceptional importance.

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Nominated by President Clinton, Judge Thomas was confirmed by the Senate on January 2, 1996, and received his commission two days later. He maintains chambers in Billings but travels extensively for oral arguments and other court business. In addition to hearing cases, he currently serves as the en banc coordinator and death penalty coordinator for the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Technology savvy, he serves on both the Ninth Circuit Information Technology Committee and the Committee on Information Technology of the U.S. Judicial Conference.

A native of Bozeman, Montana, Judge Thomas received his B.A. from Montana State University in 1975 and his J.D. from the University of Montana School of Law, graduating with honors in 1978. Prior to coming onto the federal bench, he had been in private practice in Billings from 1978 to 1995. He also was as an adjunct instructor of law at Rocky Mountain College in Billings from 1982 to 1995.

Chief Judge Thomas is married to attorney Martha Sheehy, a former president of the State Bar of Montana, who practices law in Billings. They have two children.

Judge Thomas is the Ninth Circuit's 11th chief judge and the third to hail from Montana. Montanans who previously led the court were Chief Judge Emeriti James R. Browning, the eponym for the Ninth Circuit headquarters building in San Francisco, and Walter Lyndon Pope. Judge Browning, who died in 2012, served on the court for 50 years and was chief judge from 1976 to 1988. Judge Pope, who sat on the court from 1949 until his death in 1969, was chief judge for one year, 1959.

Judge Kozinski steps down after a successful seven-year term in which the court greatly expanded the use of technology to improve operations and make the judicial process more accessible to the public. Among many noteworthy advances during his tenure, the court completed its migration to electronic case filing with 42,728 attorneys currently registered to use the system, and expanded the use of cameras in the courtroom, becoming the first and currently only federal appellate court to live video stream oral arguments on the Internet.

The Ninth Circuit encompasses Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, the U.S. Territory of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. It includes the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the federal trial and bankruptcy courts in the 15 judicial districts within the circuit. All told, the Ninth Circuit accounts for roughly 20 percent of the entire caseload of the federal court system.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals is the nation's largest with 29 authorized judgeships and 12,061 filings for the 12-month period ending September 30, 2014.